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Lest we forget

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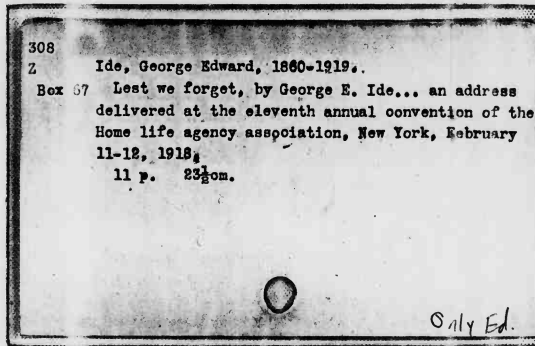
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"Lest We Forget"

"LEST WE FORGET"

By

GEORGE E. IDE

President of the Home Life Insurance Company

An Address delivered at the
ELEVENTH ANNUAL CONVENTION
of the
HOME LIFE AGENCY ASSOCIATION

NEW YORK
February 11-12, 1918

2 March, 1926 - C.R.W.

"Lest We Forget"

During the last four years there has been so much public utterance in reference to the conduct and practice of the War that we have all hoped, and perhaps naturally, that upon the signing of the Armistice, this era of speaking and writing would cease together with other War activities.

It would appear that everything has been said which can be said in regard to the long and patient suffering of our Allies before we entered the War and the valiant and heroic service rendered by our troops after the United States really took an active part in the World's Conflict. From philosophers and thinkers, both combatants and non-combatants, we have received impressions as to what this war revolution will mean to the future of the world's social and political life. My only excuse for adding to this mass of utterance is that we are a family whose habit it is to stop once a year and view contemporary questions as they appear to us, in the hope that by so doing we may become better citizens of this beloved land of ours and better members of the society of the world. If any message is to be worth while now, it must be direct and simple.

Conditions cannot be the same now that this War is over. For those who by temperament and education are naturally inclined to believe that "Whatever is, is right", I fear the future holds in

store many rude shocks, and yet in intelligent and progressive conservatism lies the only check to anarchy and chaos. The millennium is not yet arrived and, in the main, men will be in the future what they have been in the past, but the practical idealist must not balk at what appear to be insurmountable obstacles.

The War has taught us that old distinctions count for little. Community of suffering and intimacy of contact have shown the soldier that the rich and poor, the man of influence and power in his former life and the private from the so-called lower classes have the same hopes and aspirations, the same affections and ambitions, yes, and even the same religious faith, although expressed in different languages and viewed from widely divergent angles. Such has been the refining, enlightening and clarifying influence of this ordeal of fire, of this life in the presence of death. These salutary lessons will, I firmly believe, be retained by those who have had the thrilling experience of actual War Service, but we, "the stay-at-homes," must also realize these truths if we are to accommodate our past habits of thought to the new era upon which we are now entering.

In the past, many who have watched with interest the growth and tendencies of our youth have viewed with some misgivings, the want of co-ordination in our plan of education, the lack of discipline, the absence of the teachings of respect for age and experience. Service in the Army and Navy has provided this teaching to those fortunate enough to be in it. Co-ordination, discipline, obedience, respect, have been taught our young men

and they have learned to know from real experience that under these principles alone can great achievements be successfully accomplished. To those who have seen the raw recruits representing every phase of human character, every grade of social standing and every nationality herding themselves indiscriminately together for common service and then a few months later have seen these same men organized, trained, obedient, confident of themselves, proud of their organizations, marching with heads erect on their way to France, no grander proof is needed that love of order and voluntary submission to intelligent authority are, after all, the only effective foundations of true efficiency.

Another conspicuous truth has been developed by the War, that is, the value of unselfish service for others. This has been impressed not only on those who themselves bore arms but upon every one who for insufficient direct reward or for no material reward has labored to aid the Government in its achievements. Fighting men and civilians alike have felt the joy and satisfaction, have realized the worth and glory of such service and have learned, if they have read their experiences aright, that at last they have discovered the secret of the perfect life. The value of true service is not to be measured by the result accruing to the individual who gives the service but by the effect upon the recipients of that service. The motive of true service must be absolutely disinterested.

Another important teaching of the war has been that in the accomplishment of every great national aim every person must take a share. Democracy

has never learned a grander lesson than that which this war has taught in proving as it does that when class distinctions, local distinctions and party distinctions are forgotten and the great body of the American people unite in a common cause for righteousness and justice, its power is irresistible. From the General in Command down to the most humble private, from the mightiest Captain of industry down to the schoolchild buying the little Thrift Stamp, every one about us has given his best to the common cause. Never was seen such unanimity of purpose, such universal devotion to one aim since we have become a real Nation. The results speak for themselves.

The grandest feature of this world convulsion is, however, the decisive defeat which has been administered to materialistic philosophy and materialistic kultur. When to Belgium's King the German Army presented the stern demand for free passage through his domain, that calm hero denied the right of entry and, turning to his Queen, said—"S'il faut mourir, mourons avec honneur". With this refusal given what could be expected but death? And yet he reigns to-day triumphant after years of suffering. With France so nearly unprepared and England resisting with her "contemptible" army, how could we imagine that the onslaught of the invader would be stopped and yet the "miracle" of the first battle of the Marne "happened" and Paris was saved. Military critics agreed that Verdun must fall and, yet for months, despite the hordes of Germans who assailed it, the French held fast. "Ils ne passeront pas" was their watchword, and they held their ground

through the might of that idea crystalized in the mind of every man of France and permeating the heart of the nation. Materialism met its first repulse when the true spirit of these two nations fighting for unperishable principles asserted itself in all its might and it met its Waterloo when the clear idealism of our own nation in the hour of greatest depression showed to Europe that we, too, shared those ideals and that we, too, had found our soul.

My only excuse for reminding you again of these lessons of the war, so apparent and so oft repeated, is that the value of these principles is now *established by practical experience*, and they can be well applied to our new problems without the charge being made that they are visionary and unpractical.

Look for a moment at the political situation. Does the average citizen realize the value of his vote? Does he attach to it the same importance that he did to the Government appeals for Liberty Loan subscriptions, for general thrift, for food and fuel saving and for the other war activities? He may realize that his community is not properly represented by the men it sends to Washington and to the State Legislature, but the obstacles which confront him in blocking the abuses of the Primary System, in fighting the corruption of the political machinery in his Ward or District, seem to him insurmountable and he does nothing. He was a good citizen during the war. Can he not still be a good citizen? Cannot the average voter be taught and made to feel that the country needs his service at all times, even if that service in-

volves some sacrifice on his part and some departure from his old paths of easy acquiescence in the decisions and selections of the professional politician? Real power rests always in the people. The war has proven this and we all are the people. It should not now be impossible to improve the personnel of our Governmental representatives. The war has shown that in such a crisis, men of ability are willing to serve the country in positions of great responsibility even without emolument, and, in many instances, without adequate and well defined power. Their aid and advice have been of enormous value. Is the crisis now confronting us less important? Questions involving the preservation and interpretation of our Constitution, questions involving Governmental control and ownership, questions involving possibly the property rights of the individual are pressing upon us. Even if the present machinery of nomination has to be discarded, even if Government officials have to be accorded greater honor and increased pay, a way must be found by which men of broad vision and great experience will be attracted to important Governmental positions and retained in those positions as the reward of faithful service. These reforms are stupendous, but they can be accomplished if the American people, even in the quiet times of peace, unite in believing that they must be accomplished.

Then there is the apparently never-ending controversy between Capital and Labor. Each class has sinned against the other in the past. It would take volumes to give the record of the past and volumes more to offer a summary of the remedies

presented. This controversy usually centres about differences as to hours of labor and rate of wage. This is the material side of the question. Capital is constantly endeavoring to secure the greatest results from labor at the lowest cost. Labor is constantly seeking to obtain the highest wage and the shortest hours. Is this all there is to the question? If, as all aver, labor and capital are partners, each essential to the other, there are obligations resting upon each of the parties to this partnership. Capital must give to labor all that it can in the way of a fair and just wage, material comfort, hygienic and safe surroundings, proper protection against the hazards of the occupation and intelligent attention to the question of economic loss to the employed arising from sickness, old age and death. This must all be done on the basis not of philanthropic charity, but on the plane of benefits, which are the just reward of conscientious service and in the line of improving the efficiency of that service. If, however, these obligations rest upon the ideal employer, there must be equal and corresponding obligations resting upon the employed. The parties to this controversy, if properly viewed, are peers of each other. Labor has a right to all that we have mentioned, and these are only the main points, but if it is to receive these it must appreciate that all partnerships are based on permanency and reciprocity. We must get away from the idea that it is fair for labor to receive all that it now is seeking, unless it is willing to "play the game" as a full partner, taking deservedly its share of the profits of good times and sharing necessarily, in part at least, in the losses and depres-

sions which periodically come to all lines of business. The combinations of labor have done much to improve labor conditions, but the ideal will not be reached nor will our progress be toward the attainment of that ideal unless each of these parties comes to a clear realization of the basis of true service and unless each realizes his obligations to the other. Permanency of business relations means stability and leads to success, but the guarantee of permanency cannot be exacted only of one party to the contract. Employment of labor should be a contract agreement. It cannot be as long as labor insists that one party is bound to keep the contract and the other may break it at will. The equality of the parties to this contract is further impaired when labor demands by law that there shall be written into the contract certain conditions, which, in many instances, so restrict and hamper the wise and honest employer that he cannot do justice to the labor which he employs. If the leaders of labor-thought would study the lessons of the war, if they would realize that false distinctions of rank and class have now received their death-blow, if they would realize that the great army of labor, like our military army, must be organized so that individual ambition is encouraged and individual promotion made possible, if they would realize that discipline and co-ordination are now elements of proven value, if they would realize that service to be helpful, progressive and effective must be disinterested and unselfish, they would find that under their feet they have the firm ground of eternal truth, and the same in its proper application is true in no less

degree of the employer. All this is idealistic. True, but these are times when ideals need no defense, provided they be sound.

These two suggestions as to the application of the Lessons of the War to our Civic Duty and to the Labor question have been only outlined in a most general way and are given simply as examples of what is in our mind. If we desire that in all relations of life these lessons may be effective for good, does not the matter become one of individual application? It will be very easy for us in the dull period of peace to relapse into our old rut of selfish materialism. Each individual, however, has about him a circle of others whose life and happiness are more or less directed and influenced by him. No matter how large or small that circle may be, his first duty is to the individuals within that circle. This is not the idea of the average social reformer. He, represented, as you remember, by Professor Sumner as "A", is constantly concocting schemes by which "B" and "C" shall be made to do something they do not want to do—a splendid scheme of philanthropy for "A", who is not affected thereby. Real reform, real progress must come from the individual. "A", who within his circle by precept and practice, stands for justice, freedom, order and right, is more apt to be effective in his reform if he confines his activities to his own circle, in which he has to share and experience the effects of his own acts. In fact, individual influence upon and co-operation with those with whom one comes in contact are the greatest factors in determining the results attained by the individual. The net accomplishment of each indi-

vidual life is measured by the character and steadfastness of purpose shown in that limited personal circle. The Ten Commandments may seem cold and mandatory, but the Sermon on the Mount is human in its philosophy. If each man took the grand principles taught and vindicated by the war, if he realized that these are now practical forces, if he applied them to his intercourse with his "neighbor", and, what is more, applied them to his every act, the question of a living, forceful, practical philosophy would be solved and we would find ourselves in a world where all have equal rights and equal opportunities, where discipline promotes order and order engenders freedom, where service is only worth while when rendered unselfishly for others, where all work for the common good and where materialism is superseded by the Gospel of clear and spiritual vision.

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